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Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

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Tuesday, 14 February 2006, 11.25 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Bolton	(United States of America)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Wang Guangya
	Congo	Mr. Ikouebe
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Kitaoka
	Peru	Mr. De Rivero
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Nasser
	Russian Federation	Mr. Denisov
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Thomson
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Manongi

Agenda

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2006/45)

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06-24331 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 11.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2006/45)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Albania, Austria, Serbia and Montenegro, Turkey and Ukraine, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Perovic (Serbia and Montenegro), took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council table.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Søren Jessen-Petersen, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Jessen-Petersen to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2006/45, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Søren Jessen-Petersen, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

Mr. Jessen-Petersen: May I begin by thanking you, Mr. President, and the Council as a whole, for allowing time for this meeting and for agreeing that I be accompanied today by the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Mr. Bajram Kosumi.

Since my last report to the Council, on 24 October last year (see S/PV.5289), there have been three major issues defining politics in Kosovo. The first, and most recent, is the tragic loss of President Ibrahim Rugova and the orderly and dignified transition to the election of a new President. The second is the opening of the status process. The third is the continuing — indeed, revitalized — push for progress on standards implementation, on decentralization and on the full inclusion of all minority communities in the creation of Kosovo's future.

Last Friday, the Assembly of Kosovo met and, by a large majority, elected Mr. Fatmir Sejdiu as President of Kosovo. President Sejdiu has already sent a letter to you, Mr. President, and I understand that it has been distributed to members of the Council.

The election of President Sejdiu followed the tragic death of President Ibrahim Rugova. Throughout his life, President Rugova maintained a vision of a free, tolerant and democratic Kosovo, and it is around that vision that others can unify in order to achieve its realization. The loss of such a pivotal figure is hard for any society, and it was hard for Kosovo, but Kosovo's people and institutions responded with dignity, resolve and maturity — a maturity that was remarked on by many, locals and internationals alike, who attended the memorial service and funeral on 26 January.

I would like to express my appreciation for the response of the international community in sending impressive delegations to the memorial ceremony in Pristina. Not only was it a gesture of respect for the late President, but it also demonstrated the international community's continued engagement in

and strong support for Kosovo as it moves towards resolution of its status.

The arrangements for that sombre event were in the hands of the local authorities, and they deserve enormous credit. Theirs was an achievement of which any society could be justly proud. Today, let me thank the Kosovo Force and its commander for their support during the event, as well as over the past month.

Though I am reluctant to single out any one institution when so many contributed, I do feel bound to salute the performance of the Kosovo Police Service (KPS). The KPS was solely responsible for front-line security and crowd management on the day of President Rugova's funeral. The 3,500 officers on duty that day showed professionalism and sensitivity in coping with masses of mourners numbering into the hundreds of thousands, as well as a large number of important visitors from abroad. Those officers came from all communities in Kosovo. More than 10 per cent of the KPS strength is made up of Kosovo Serbs, out of a total minority representation of 16.2 per cent. At senior levels, the proportion of minorities rises to approximately 20 per cent — considerably higher than most estimates of the proportion of minorities in Kosovo's population as a whole.

Kosovo's political response to the loss of Ibrahim Rugova has been as mature and dignified as was the management of his funeral. Just after the mourning period, the Assembly of Kosovo rapidly scheduled a session to elect a new president — Mr. Fatmir Sejdiu — which was secured last Friday with votes from a very large proportion of the members of the Assembly of Kosovo.

The very next day, last Saturday, President Fatmir Sejdiu convened his colleagues on Kosovo's negotiating team — Assembly President Nexhat Daci, Prime Minister Bajram Kosumi, Democratic Party of Kosovo leader Hashim Thaci and ORA leader Veton Surroi — in order to take forward President Rugova's positive vision through the status process. At that meeting, the team approved a negotiating platform on decentralization in advance of a meeting between Pristina and Belgrade, to take place in Vienna under the auspices of the Status Envoy, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, on 20 February.

As the Security Council has acknowledged in the past, the status quo in Kosovo is not sustainable. It follows that the status process should not become a continuation of the status quo. The acceleration of the status process is the best contribution that can be made now to ensuring political stability in Kosovo and in the wider region.

But, as has been made clear by the Status Envoy, Mr. Ahtisaari, and as was reiterated by the foreign ministers of the Contact Group in London a fortnight ago, the pace of progress in the status process is largely up to the institutions and people of Kosovo themselves, through a greater commitment to the implementation of standards — notably those that are essential to the building of a truly multi-ethnic society.

The Secretary-General's recent report and my own technical assessment of 6 January, covering the period up to 15 December, have both made it clear that there was, in the latter part of last year, a noticeable slow-down in the pace of implementation of standards in Kosovo. The most worrying of the slow-downs noted in my technical assessment was in the field of minority rights. That is an area in which, with the status process under way and with the stance of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government on its outcome being well-known, Kosovo's leaders cannot afford to show anything less than complete commitment, sincerity and action.

The critical observations made in those reports — and directly by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and myself to the Kosovo authorities - have had an effect. As of mid-December, we have noticed fresh initiatives to push standards implementation forward through short-term, results-oriented governmental action plans, the next of which is expected to be adopted at next week's Government session and to cover the coming three months.

The pace and commitment demonstrated in the latest action plan must be maintained, and efforts redoubled, in the months ahead. Standards, as a political priority, cannot be subsumed by status. Symbolic gestures, genuinely important though they are, are not sufficient. Actions must be substantive and serious. They must also be sustained. The incorporation of standards into the latest European Partnership document has ensured that the policies that have helped to guide Kosovo into the status process will continue to guide Kosovo's future even after a status settlement.

Meanwhile, decentralization remains a key issue and one with both a current and a future importance, not least in terms of minority rights. As such, it is a touchstone of the seriousness of the Kosovo Albanians' political leadership in demonstrating what kind of society they wish Kosovo to be. The Vienna meeting on decentralization convened by the Status Envoy will present an opportunity to demonstrate that the concerns expressed by minorities are being met on the Kosovo Albanian side with understanding on substance and generosity in spirit. The indications that I have received make me hopeful that it is an opportunity that will be seized.

Decentralization is only one of many areas in which it is vital that we — Kosovo's institutions and the international community — reach out as much as possible to the Kosovo Serbs. For Kosovo Albanians, the status process inspires hope, but for many Kosovo Serbs it inspires fear. Every possible effort must be made by every political actor to reconcile the hopes of the majority and the fears of the Kosovo Serb minority.

The best way of ensuring that the Kosovo Serbs have a voice and that it is heard would be for them to engage directly with, and ideally in, Kosovo's institutions. Belgrade's continuing refusal to countenance that does nothing to improve conditions for Serbs in Kosovo and it does everything to worsen their already acute political isolation. How can we — how can any of us — reassure the Kosovo Serbs today about their future in Kosovo if they are discouraged from participating directly in the design of that future?

The Contact Group has made plain that the eventual status settlement must include significant provisions for minority rights. If Kosovo's representatives in the status process are themselves proactive in arguing for such verifiable provisions, they will be doing Kosovo a favour, for justifiable dispensations willingly offered are clearly a better foundation for the future than intransigent positions grudgingly abandoned.

In the meantime, though, there is ample scope for cooperation between Kosovo's Serbs and the majority community on a wide range of practical issues, electricity supply being an example high on everyone's mind at the moment. Such cooperation would be easier and more productive if it came with the acceptance and support of Belgrade. The refusal of such support is rooted in politics, but its effects are damaging to the welfare of individual Serbs in Kosovo, and it is they who have to cope with the consequences.

With the beginning of the status process, the United Nations mission in Kosovo has entered its most critical phase. Now, as in the past, our focus must remain on building in Kosovo a society that is democratic, multi-ethnic, inclusive and tolerant; a society which is internally at ease with its own diversity; a society which is outward-looking and committed to a future of peace and cooperation alongside all of its neighbours, in an integrated Europe.

I am convinced, after long service with UNMIK, that Kosovo — its people and its institutions — is committed to moving in that direction. Much has been achieved; much more must and will be done. The next months offer an opportunity for Kosovo's leaders to redouble their efforts, to reach out to Kosovo's Serbs and to the other minorities and to register solid and substantive progress. But it is, equally, a period when the Kosovo Serbs must seize the opportunity provided by the status talks and take an active part in the central and municipal institutions in Kosovo if they wish to shape the future of a truly multi-ethnic Kosovo. Finally, it is a period in which Belgrade must encourage and support such Kosovo Serb participation in the institutions.

In the western Balkans, the appalling politics of the 1990s had human suffering, ethnic cleansing and forcible displacement as their goal, and not merely as their consequence. Our goal must now be to make good the political wrongs of the past, with a focus on the rights of all people — of individuals and families — for the future.

The majority in Kosovo, who suffered so much as a minority themselves in the past, have a right to expect that their aspirations will be met when Kosovo's status is decided. The minorities, who have in turn suffered revenge and isolation, have a right to expect that their concerns will be just as seriously heard and addressed. My hope as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Kosovo over the past 18 months is that, with a settlement of the status issue, the people of Kosovo can finally leave the past behind and set out as one on the journey towards the Euro-Atlantic family of nations.

The President: I thank Mr. Jessen-Petersen for his briefing.

I invite those Council members who wish to take the floor to so indicate to the Secretariat.

Mr. Denisov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): My delegation welcomes the participation in today's meeting of Mr. Tadic, President of the Republic of Serbia, and of Mr. Jessen-Petersen, Head of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, as well as the delegation accompanying him. We are grateful to the Secretary-General for his report (S/2006/45) on the activities of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo and to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro.

We, like the Secretary-General, have some serious concerns about the stalling and, in some cases, the regression, in the process of the implementation of standards in the province, particularly with regard to the still very low rates of returns of refugees and internally displaced persons. Important steps have not yet been taken to enable those who want to return to do so. It is too early to talk about the existence of the required guarantees in terms of rights, security and freedom of movement for minorities, particularly Serbs. The problems of decentralization are far from being resolved, as are those relating to the protection of the religious and cultural heritage of minorities.

Despite the efforts of the United Nations Mission and of the Kosovo Force (KFOR), the situation in the province is far from stable. We associate ourselves with the Secretary-General's urgent appeal to the leaders of the province to intensify their efforts to guarantee real, solid progress in the implementation of standards, particularly those standards that are of priority importance for the national minorities. Progress in those areas will be an important indicator of the willingness of the leadership of Kosovo to lay the foundations for a multi-ethnic democratic society in which members of all communities can live in decent, safe conditions.

Like our partners in the Contact Group, we are convinced that, with regard to implementing standards, only concrete, practical results — not symbolic gestures — will have an important influence on the pace and productiveness of the negotiating process that is to determine the future status of Kosovo. So far in Kosovo, the necessary conditions are not in place for finding a status solution, particularly because of the lack of progress in implementing key standards.

In the context of the settlement of such problems, we welcome the organization of direct meetings between the Serbs and the Kosovo Albanians, with the facilitation of Mr. Ahtisaari, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Future Status Process for Kosovo. We are prepared to lend support to his efforts to establish direct dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina.

The passing of Ibrahim Rugova was a severe loss for the Albanian community of Kosovo. We will remember him as their most authoritative leader, who strove for a non-violent solution to the Kosovo problem. We hope that the leadership of the province, including the new President, Mr. Sejdiu, will do everything possible to ensure calm and security and will demonstrate a responsible and constructive attitude during the talks to determine the future status of Kosovo, in the interests of peace, stability and prosperity for all of its people.

The basis for defining the future status of the province should be the principle of gradualism. We should start by reaching agreement on specific aspects of the status process, and only then move on to discussing actual future status. Such a gradual approach could create the necessary atmosphere for subsequent agreement between the parties on a status formula.

We believe that there are various possible status options. During the direct talks, the parties must themselves reach agreement on the future status of Kosovo, without any decisions being imposed on them — with, of course, international facilitation, represented by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ahtisaari. Such agreement must be equally acceptable to Belgrade and to Pristina and must be in keeping with international legal norms and with resolution 1244 (1999), and must then be backed up by a new Security Council resolution.

Working out a compromise will require time and a major effort by the parties, as well as by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and the Contact Group. The Security Council has a lead role to play in Kosovo's affairs, and it will continue, on an ongoing basis, to monitor the implementation of standards in the provinces and the development of the status process.

We believe that it would be counterproductive to set any strict time frames in that regard. We are not

talking about protracting the talks indefinitely. However, as experience in resolving many conflict situations has shown, arbitrary time limitations could undo any possibility of reaching necessary compromise decisions.

Ensuring the success of the international effort in Kosovo will depend on subsequent compliance with resolution 1244 (1999) and the guiding principles of the Contact Group, and on the parties to the process agreeing on a mutually acceptable negotiating outcome. That is the only way to achieve the goal of solid stabilization in Kosovo and in the Balkans as a whole.

When resolving conflict, the international community should not use double standards. It is clear to us that the formula for resolving the problem of Kosovo objectively will have an impact on the development of the situation with regard to other conflicts, too. That is precisely why the Security Council can support only a negotiated decision, not a one-sided one. This would not create a negative precedent in international crisis settlement. At any event, the situation in the province cannot be called unique, and the exact way in which a solution to the future status issue is found will have a universal character.

In conclusion, I wish once again to welcome President Tadic, who has come here to be present at today's meeting.

The President: On behalf of the Security Council, I extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Mr. Boris Tadic, President of the Republic of Serbia, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Tadic (Serbia and Montenegro) (*spoke in Serbian; interpretation provided by the delegation*): It is my honour to present to the Security Council, on behalf of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, our view of the situation in Kosovo and Metohija, especially in the light of the recent report of the Secretary-General on developments in the province (S/2006/45).

I am also glad to see a legitimate representative of the Albanian people from Kosovo and Metohija in the delegation of Mr. Jessen-Petersen, but I have to warn that it would be very dangerous if his presence today were seen in the light of prejudging the status process, which is to begin soon.

More than two and a half months ago, talks on the future status of Kosovo and Metohija formally began under the auspices of the United Nations. At that time, the Security Council and other relevant members of the international community clearly stated that, in parallel with the future-status talks, the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government and the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) had to work on fulfilling the standards in Kosovo and Metohija much more rapidly and effectively than they had before. If the standards are not fulfilled, there can be no institutional guarantees of individual rights and freedoms, no economic recovery and no European perspective for the inhabitants of Kosovo and Metohija. Similarly, if the standards are not fulfilled, the possibility of achieving a negotiated solution on future status becomes far less likely.

Serbia and Montenegro accepted the position of the Security Council that the talks on the future status of the province should begin, despite the fact that the standards were obviously far from being achieved. We thus demonstrated our readiness to seek a negotiated solution to the problem of Kosovo and Metohija. In seeking a political compromise, however, Serbia and Montenegro remains firmly committed to the fundamental principles and norms of international law, in particular those concerning the sovereignty and territorial integrity of internationally recognized States. Moreover, the position of my country is not only in full accord with the principles and existing practices of international relations today; it is also fully consistent with all United Nations documents relating to Kosovo and Metohija, in particular Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

The Secretary-General's report for the second half of last year explicitly states that, in spite of certain positive results, the fulfilment of the standards in Kosovo and Metohija has been far too slow and that there have been "delays or setbacks in most areas" (*S/2006/45, para. 16*) in the implementation of standards. This situation is harmful for all the inhabitants of the province, but its grave negative consequences are far more serious for Serbs than for the rest of the population. It is not only that they are more frequently the victims of the worst kinds of persecution and discrimination. The heart of the problem is that great injustices have been committed against them since June 1999 and that most of these have yet to be rectified. About 60 per cent of the

Serbian population has been expelled from Kosovo and Metohija during this period; they still live as internally displaced persons in central Serbia, waiting for the chance to return to their homes. That has not yet been made possible. All of the province's cities, with the exception of the northern part of Kosovska Mitrovica, were ethnically cleansed of Serbs in 1999 and remain so today. Yet it is hard to imagine a multi-ethnic Kosovo without Serbs living in cities such as Pristina, Prizren or Peć. Thus, even though there might be some progress in the implementation of standards, if it does not affect the crucial issue of the return of internally displaced persons such progress is not decisive.

The Serbs who despite everything have remained in Kosovo and Metohija live either in the northernmost part of the province in several Serb-majority municipalities or south of the Ibar river, in enclaves of various sizes, where they face constant pressure and discrimination by the Albanian majority. The situation in those enclaves with respect to personal security and freedom of movement is still precarious, and with rampant unemployment and poverty the living standards in general remain far below average. The enclaves suffer discrimination at the hands of the Pristina authorities with regard to the distribution of electricity, and have recently been cut off from the rest of the world by being denied normal access to means of communication and sources of information. Pristina has blocked their access to the fixed and mobile telephone networks of Telekom Srbija, which operates legally in Kosovo and Metohija. They have also blocked the transmission of a Serbian-language television station that operates out of the north of the province. Allow me therefore to say once again: even though there might be some progress in the implementation of standards, if it does not affect the crucial issue of the Serbian enclaves such progress is not decisive.

The situation in the province being what it is, Serbia, including the Serbs of Kosovo and Metohija, looks forward to the future-status process both with hope and with concern. We hope that the future-status talks will lead to a lasting, stable and just solution, for the present circumstances satisfy neither the Serbs nor the Albanians, nor the international community. But at the same time, we are concerned that the negotiations might be undermined by an imposed independence of Kosovo and Metohija, a solution that would both contravene international law and destabilize the political situation in the Balkans. I therefore wish clearly to present the position of Serbia and Montenegro on the two possible outcomes of the future-status process. I want to emphasize the advantages of a negotiated compromise solution and the dangers of a unilateral imposed solution.

It was recently pointed out from within the Contact Group itself that the Kosovo question must be resolved by applying universal principles of international law, for otherwise a dangerous precedent would be established not only for the Balkans but for other parts of the world as well. The legal and political foundations of the international order cannot be upheld in the case of some nations and States and disregarded in the case of others. That is the lesson Serbia learned from its troubled legacy of the 1990s, but it applies elsewhere as well. The Serbian people demonstrated this when, guided by the ideals of democracy, they peacefully overthrew the regime of Slobodan Milosevic in 2000. To argue that secession from an internationally recognized State is an unacceptable principle but to claim at the same time that the very same demand should be acknowledged in the case of the Kosovo Albanians because they suffered so much under the Milosevic regime is to ignore not only international law but also the political consequences of such a unilateral decision being imposed upon Serbia and Montenegro. That is why most countries in the region look at the possible secession of Kosovo and Metohija with grave concern or even openly oppose such an outcome. The independence of Kosovo and Metohija would lead to a unilateral change of internationally recognized borders in the Balkans. That would politically destabilize the region and would open the possibility of renewing past conflicts. Only Albania supports the demand of its ethnic kin in Kosovo and Metohija to secede from Serbia and from Serbia and Montenegro.

To view Kosovo as an exception and a unique case is, therefore, dangerous and politically unwise, however numerous the supporters of that idea may be. If the claim to independence were recognized in the case of the Kosovo Albanians, why should ethnic groups in other countries that just as vocally and passionately demand independence be treated any differently?

In this sense, it is true that the "Kosovo case" is more important than Kosovo itself. The solution of the Kosovo and Metohija issue will be of enormous

significance not only for the Balkans but for European security in general. The system of democratic values embraced by today's world has no way to accommodate the political aspirations of the Kosovo Albanians while at the same time rejecting demands for unilateral secession as a matter of principle. If, notwithstanding this, Kosovo and Metohija should become independent, secessionist movements in many other parts of the world would unfortunately be encouraged and provided with a strong argument in favour of their cause.

The negative consequences of the sympathy that is often shown to the Albanian demand for the independence of Kosovo are already becoming clear. Instead of seeing the plight of the Kosovo Serbs as proof that the political elite of the Kosovo Albanians is not truly committed to a multi-ethnic society, it is becoming increasingly common to argue that Serbia should accept the independence of Kosovo and Metohija in exchange for an improvement of the situation of the Serbian community. The Serbs are, in effect, asked to accept the independence of Kosovo and Metohija in order to be given recognition of their basic human rights and freedoms.

I personally find this way of thinking deeply alien. It is also alien to Serbian democracy, and I firmly believe that it is inconsistent with the democratic values of the contemporary world. Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, like people elsewhere in the world, have the right to individual freedom and security, the right to protect their national and cultural identity, and the right to exercise freedom of expression, religious freedom, and freedom of political association, as well as property rights. These rights of Kosovo and Metohija Serbs must be recognized. The international administration in the province, and ultimately the United Nations, have accepted this as an obligation of their own, as is perfectly clear from the Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). These rights therefore are not, and must never be, part of political horse-trading between Belgrade and Pristina. Freedom, the right to justice and democracy belong to every man; they must not be made a political bargaining chip.

The first round of talks on the future status of Kosovo and Metohija is to begin in less than a week's time. On the agenda of the meeting in Vienna will be decentralization, which the political leadership in Belgrade — as well as the Kosovo and Metohija Serbs — sees as a realistic means to restore normal living conditions to the Serb community in the province and to facilitate the return of internally displaced persons. The Belgrade decentralization plan was made public more than a month ago. It contains minimal institutional requirements for the survival of the Serbian community in Kosovo and Metohija. The attitude of the Albanian side to the plan will, I think, give a good indication of what can be expected in the next phase of negotiations — the phase that will address the issue of the future status itself.

In our view, that phase should be carried out through direct talks between the two sides, with the assistance of the international community. It should be devoted to reaching a political compromise between the two seemingly irreconcilable options. That is not an easy task, but it should also be a test of the political maturity and democratic commitment of those who will find themselves at the negotiating table.

The general outline of Belgrade's political platform on the future status of Kosovo and Metohija is well known, and it is unnecessary for me to repeat it here. But I wish nevertheless to emphasize several points that are essential to the common future of the Western Balkans and to its European perspective.

First, the political compromise offered by Belgrade opens the way for a negotiated settlement of the last great conflict in the former Yugoslavia, a way that avoids a unilateral change of internationally recognized borders and the political instability that would inevitably follow. Second, the Albanians of Kosovo and Metohija would enjoy very wide political autonomy, an autonomy that in most matters of everyday life would make them totally self-governing in relation to Belgrade — on condition that they accept the same autonomy for the Serbian entity in the province.

Third, the resulting negotiated settlement would be internationally guaranteed and, after an agreed period of time — say twenty years — may be subject to renegotiation. Fourth, the process of the integration of Serbia and Montenegro, including Kosovo and Metohija, into the European Union would continue in accordance with appropriate accession mechanisms. The specific elements of such a solution — the particulars that would make it viable and thus establish a suitable foundation for the rule of law and multi-ethnic coexistence in Kosovo and Metohija — can only be found through direct talks between the two sides.

A democratic Serbia is ready to engage in these talks. We shall do everything we can to make them succeed, defending our own legitimate interests while at the same time respecting the legitimate interests of others. If we all act in this manner — that is, negotiations — I am convinced that the talks will succeed and that we will be in a position to open a new chapter in the long, conflict-ridden history of relations between Serbs and Albanians. That new chapter would be an important step toward the political, economic and cultural integration of the Balkans into Europe — a goal that contemporary Serbia shares with other countries in our part of the world.

Mr. Thomson (United Kingdom): My delegation are grateful to the Secretary-General for his report and to his Special Representative, Mr. Jessen-Petersen, for his briefing today and for his outstanding leadership of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). The continued unflagging energy and integrity that he brings to his work are admirable.

It is good to welcome President Tadic, and I thank him for his intervention. The United Kingdom is also pleased to see Prime Minister Kosumi in the delegation of the Special Representative.

The United Kingdom associates itself with the European Union statement to be delivered by Ambassador Pfanzelter of Austria.

The United Kingdom deeply regrets the sad passing of President Rugova, who devoted his life to pursuing Kosovo's interest peacefully. The swift and smooth election of President Sejdiu is a credit to Kosovo's institutions and political maturity.

The United Kingdom shares the concern of the Secretary-General that progress in implementing the standards for Kosovo has slowed. We urge President Sejdiu, Prime Minister Kosumi and their Government to engage with Kosovo's Serb community and with Belgrade to create a stable, secure and prosperous Kosovo for all its people, regardless of ethnicity. We call on the Provisional Institutions and on Belgrade's political leaders to accelerate work on implementing standards, especially in the key areas of returns, rule of law, freedom of movement and the preservation of cultural and religious heritage.

I wanted to make three points on priorities for the coming months. The first is immediate: the United Kingdom joins UNMIK, the World Health Organization and UNICEF in urging Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian internally displaced persons to leave lead-polluted camps and move to the safer environment offered by UNMIK at Osterode camp. This is a matter of urgency, especially for the children involved. The United Kingdom also hopes that both Belgrade and Pristina will work constructively on the issue of missing persons, which still affects many families in Serbia and Kosovo today. We hope that both sides will treat this humanitarian issue with the respect and importance it deserves.

Secondly, decentralization is a key measure of progress and an important element in reassuring minorities. The United Kingdom welcomes the meeting in Vienna scheduled for 20 February to discuss concrete proposals on this issue. We hope that the parties will engage in serious discussion to find a way to improve the daily lives of Kosovo's minority communities.

Thirdly, the authorities in Belgrade should actively encourage Kosovo's Serbs to take their rightful place in Kosovo's government institutions. The only way for Kosovo Serbs' interests to be fully reflected now and in the future is through their full engagement in Kosovo's political life. They and other minority communities in Kosovo should seize the opportunity afforded by the current future-status process, led by the Secretary-General's Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari, to ensure that their concerns are addressed and to shape their own future in Kosovo.

Every post-conflict situation is different; each calls for solutions specific to that situation. To try to squeeze all such situations into a single mould is to risk failing to achieve the Council's objectives on re-establishing international peace and security and delivering prosperity and stability for the peoples in the given situation and their region. The particular situation of Kosovo has been under Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) for an extended period of international administration since the appalling events of 1999. Any settlement resulting from the current future-status process should be concluded, we believe, during 2006. And it clearly cannot disregard the aspirations of 90 per cent of the population of Kosovo.

So independence is a realistic option. Indeed, some might say it is the only option that will bring lasting stability and security not only in Kosovo, but in the wider region. But Prime Minister Kosumi and his

Government must understand that they need to demonstrate to the international community, and especially to the Security Council, that they are genuinely committed to the protection of minority rights and to a multi-ethnic Kosovo. It is a statement of the obvious that the more they do so, the smoother the final-status process will be.

We have heard Special Representative Jessen-Petersen refer to concerns about the pace of progress on standards. Kosovo's status — whatever it is to be — must be fair to the interests of all communities in Kosovo and must promote regional stability and multi-ethnicity. As Contact Group Foreign Ministers concluded at their meeting in London on 31 January, now is the time for leaders in Serbia and Kosovo to show the political courage and vision necessary to come forward with realistic and far-sighted proposals for the futures of both Kosovo and Serbia. A negotiated settlement would enhance prospects for integration into Euro-Atlantic structures in the future, but that goal will depend on clear and realistic decisions being made today by leaders on all sides.

In conclusion, the United Kingdom will continue to work in the Contact Group, in the Council, in the European Union and in the region to build a stable and sustainable European future for Kosovo and for the region as a whole, in which Serbia and Montenegro too assumes its rightful place in the European family.

Mr. Vassilakis (Greece): Permit me to welcome President Tadic, representative of a new, democratic Serbia, and to thank him for his intervention.

We thank the Secretary-General for his latest report (S/2006/45) and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Jessen-Petersen, for his comprehensive briefing. We welcome his presence here today, together with the delegation of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), which includes Prime Minister Kosumi.

Greece associates itself with the statement to be delivered later by the Austrian presidency of the European Union.

Before I start, I would like to pay tribute to the late President Ibrahim Rugova and especially to his legacy of peaceful pursuit of the rights of his people and his belief in a Kosovo society based on tolerance and dialogue. In respecting his memory, the Kosovo leadership will, it is to be hoped, enshrine the very same principles in their future policies. In that context, we expect that the election of Fatmir Sejdiu as his successor last Friday will contribute to the strengthening of the commitment of the Kosovo leadership to the creation of a democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo.

Today is the first opportunity for the Council to take stock of the developments that have taken place since the launch of the status negotiations process, last November. Let us recall that, at our meeting last October (see S/PV.5289), the international community set out its expectations for the period following the presentation of Ambassador Eide's excellent report and the launch of the status process. Those expectations were, justifiably, high.

At the time, the Council stressed the need for increased and strengthened efforts on behalf of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government for progress in standards implementation. It was underlined explicitly — and this was repeated in the Secretary-General's latest report — that the pace of progress in standards implementation will be an important factor in determining the pace and progress of the status negotiations.

Today we regret that, in his recent report, the Secretary-General concluded that progress has been too slow and that there is serious concern over delays and setbacks in most areas of standards implementation. Understandably, the overall impression one comes away with is one of disappointment.

We certainly do not intend to ignore or minimize the progress achieved in certain standards areas, such as the increase in minority employment, property rights and the Kosovo Police Service. Especially noteworthy is the progress in the reconstruction of the Orthodox churches damaged during the March 2004 violence. We would like to believe that this is a sign of recognition on the part of the provisional authorities of the importance of this issue, both on its own merits and as a confidence-building measure.

The final assessment of the past few months can be only that more needs to be done. More specifically, the provisional authorities need to do much more on decentralization — the one area that holds the key to the whole negotiation process. There has been very little progress since the launch of the initial pilot projects, back in August. The first meeting of the two sides at the ministerial level, held in Vienna in

September, was a welcome step, but nothing substantial came out of it. We hope that the next meeting, scheduled for the twentieth of this month, will produce concrete results and that the two sides will participate constructively.

The security situation remains fragile. Serious security incidents not only continue to occur, but are actually increasing, as the Secretary-General notes, again with concern. More needs to be done. The impact from this, whether perceived or real, on the freedom of movement of minorities and on the return of refugees and internally displaced persons is as inevitable as it is regrettable.

More progress is also needed in many other areas of the standards process, including those of minority rights, technical dialogue, access to justice, the fight against corruption and organized crime and access to basic public services, to name but a few critical ones.

On the other hand, it is also highly regrettable that, during the reporting period, there has actually been a decline in participation in the political process by Kosovo Serb leaders. Belgrade should encourage Kosovo Serb leaders to participate constructively in the Provisional Institutions. The establishment of substantial dialogue between all of Kosovo's communities, as well as between Belgrade and Pristina, remains of crucial importance.

In view of the upcoming meeting in Vienna on 20 February — which in effect constitutes the beginning of the status negotiating process — I wish to reiterate the two basic principles that have guided us thus far in our discussions here in the Council. First, the implementation of standards is an obligation of Kosovo's leaders towards their people and towards their future within the larger European family. Second, our goal — of which we must not lose sight — is that any status solution must aim at a new democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo. To that end, no efforts should be spared.

In conclusion, allow me say a few words on the status process already underway.

Greece welcomed the launch of the process and the preparations by the two sides for the upcoming negotiations. Coming from the region, and consequently being one of the countries directly affected by the developments in the area, we feel the need to stress once more that it would be in everyone's interest to reach a successful outcome through a negotiated and mutually agreed settlement. That will, in turn, contribute to the stability and prosperity of the region. Such a successful outcome can be reached only by taking into account the situation on the ground, respect for minority rights and compatibility with the values of the European Union, of which the whole region will be part.

Mr. De Rivero (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Mr. Søren Jessen-Petersen, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his detailed presentation of the report on the work of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). I join others in welcoming Mr. Boris Tadic, President of Serbia. I also wish to add my voice to the condolences expressed on the death of Mr. Ibrahim Rugova, President of Kosovo, whose legacy of dialogue and non-violence should continue to guide the search for a peaceful solution for Kosovo. We also welcome the recent election of President Fatmir Sejdiu, to whom we wish success as he carries out his functions. I would also like to convey the condolences of my Government to the Government and people of Slovakia on the tragic plane accident that took the lives of 42 of its officials in the service of UNMIK.

With the beginning of the political process aimed at determining its future status, we have entered a decisive year for the future of Kosovo. The work of the United Nations is of more importance than ever. Peru would like to reaffirm its resolute support for UNMIK's undertakings.

We are encouraged by the meaningful progress made in a relatively short time with regard to preparations for the political process to determine the future status of Kosovo. The adoption of governing principles to resolve the matter, which were prepared by the Contact Group, and the preliminary meetings that have recently been held, are positive sign that we are on the right path to defining Kosovo's status. Another positive sign is the adoption by Kosovo's new Government of a negotiating platform for the Vienna meeting.

In seeking to determine the status of Kosovo, it is important that we not fall behind in implementing standards. Their implementation is central to UNMIK's work. All the authorities concerned should continue to make their best efforts to facilitate substantial progress

in that area, progress that will make it possible to establish the foundations for a lasting solution to the issue of Kosovo. The sustainability of the political process is also linked to progress in building a democratic and multi-ethnic society through the effective implementation of the standards for Kosovo.

The future Kosovo should be a democratic and multi-ethnic entity where the civil liberties set out in the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights are respected, where civil society can develop, where there is political and religious tolerance and respect for minorities and where there is a regular transfer of power through free, transparent and fair elections. However, none of that will be possible in the absence of a viable, modern economy in Kosovo that is able to join the global economy in an effort to increase people's income. That would lead to the growth of a middle class, which in every country serves as the underpinning for civil society, political parties and democracy.

We have been concerned by the tendency so far in the Security Council to attempt to resolve political problems through political formulas and elections. That is well and good, for, in rebuilding States, there is a need for institutions that have been legitimized through the popular vote. Nevertheless, that is not enough. We stress that the Council should place greater emphasis on economic and social issues, as was very effectively done for the first time in the Compact established by the London Conference on Afghanistan.

In that regard, one aspect that my country considers central is, as I have said, building a modern and viable economy that has sufficient productive capacity and can ensure the economic sustainability of democracy in Kosovo. Encouraging measures have been taken to speed up privatization. That has been reflected in the increase in private investment in the region — which had not been the case for many years — as well as in the expectation that up to 4,000 jobs may be created, either directly or indirectly. We have also noticed the progress made in budgetary management and the important contribution by the United Nations Development Programme in the employment-generation project, whose results were presented at the beginning of last December.

However, there remains a great deal to be done, given that the economy of Kosovo continues to depend on donations from the international community. This year's budget, recently approved, already has a 10 per cent deficit to be covered by donor funds. According to the publication "Kosovo in figures 2005" of the Statistical Office of Kosovo, the unemployment rate stands at almost 40 per cent of the population, of which two thirds constitute unskilled workers. The report indicates that quality basic public services are not available to any community and that urgent improvements are needed, especially in education and health. The modernization and reactivation of the economy are therefore critical to democracy in Kosovo and to the materialization of the European perspective there. In addition, the generation of economic opportunities for the local population is essential to reinforce the activities that have already taken place to fight the crime prevailing in the area, including cases of corruption, money-laundering and human trafficking.

In conclusion, Peru reiterates its commitment to supporting UNMIK's objectives and to the political process under way to determine the future status of the province. It must be a democratic, multi-ethnic and inclusive entity that is anchored in a viable economy.

Mr. Wang Guangya (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Jessen-Petersen, for his briefing. We also welcome the presence of President Tadic of the Republic of Serbia and thank him for his important statement.

We offer our condolences on the passing of Mr. Rugova. At the same time, we congratulate Mr. Sejdiu on his election as President of Kosovo.

Although some progress has been made since the onset of the status process, many problems remain. Measures should be taken promptly to implement standards in all fields so as to achieve progress as soon as possible in such priority areas as dialogue on the question of returns, outreach to ethnic minorities, and decentralization, and to carry out comprehensive reform in local Governments in preparation for the status talks.

China notes last month's meeting of the foreign ministers of the Contact Group on the question of Kosovo. Members of the Group still have major differences concerning the future status of Kosovo. Serbia and Montenegro and the Kosovo Provisional Institutions of Self-Government have expressed their respective concerns to the Security Council and the

international community as a whole. In those circumstances, we need both the political will to accelerate the status talks and safeguards for the rights and interests of all ethnic groups in Kosovo so as to enhance mutual trust and to create an environment and basis conducive to the talks.

It is in the long-term and fundamental interests of all ethnic groups and parties in Kosovo to reach a compromise on the status of Kosovo and to establish peaceful coexistence among all ethnic groups in the region. It can be assumed that future talks will be fraught with difficulties and uncertainty that will require all parties to demonstrate the necessary flexibility and pragmatism, to avoid haste and not to prejudge the outcomes of the talks. In the meantime, Kosovo's unique history must be kept in mind, and the peace and stability of the entire Balkan region must be our ultimate objective. Only thus can Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) be implemented to promote a lasting solution to the question of Kosovo.

Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia and Montenegro is of paramount importance to the status talks. The full and equal participation of all parties in the process will be equally important to regional peace and stability. China welcomes the forthcoming meeting between Serbia and Montenegro and the Kosovo Albanians in Vienna. It is our hope that the meeting will contribute to the sound evolution of the status talks.

Mr. Mayoral (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation thanks the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Jessen-Petersen, for the report he has just introduced on the activities of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). We are also grateful for the presence of the President of the Republic of Serbia, Mr. Boris Tadic, and thank him for his informative statement to the Council.

Allow me at the outset to convey our condolences to the people of Kosovo on the passing of President Ibrahim Rugova, a man who will surely be remembered for his militant commitment to the cause of Kosovo and for his prudence. We also express our satisfaction on the recent election of Mr. Fatmir Sejdiu as his successor. We hope that President Sejdiu will continue his predecessor's efforts in the pursuit of a successful conclusion of the ongoing process in the province.

The two processes currently under way in Kosovo are related and interdependent. On the one hand, significant progress has been made in the process to determine Kosovo's future status. Argentina supported the Security Council's decision last November to launch a political process and welcomes the efforts made by the political leaders involved in preparing the negotiations. In that regard, we wish the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, every success in his future tasks.

In the meantime, the process of implementing the so-called eight standards has undergone delays or setbacks and has not progressed as we would have wished. We agree with Mr. Jessen-Petersen that the implementation of the standards by Kosovo's political leaders and institutions is an obligation to the people of Kosovo. We are concerned in particular that progress in that field should transcend the relative improvements described in the report on property rights and the Kosovo Protection Corps.

In our opinion, the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government must persist in vigorously implementing the standards if they wish to fulfil the aim of creating a basis for a multi-ethnic and democratic society in which all communities can live in safety and dignity. The effective implementation of the standards is also a sine qua non of the fulfilment of Kosovo's long-term European perspective. It must be the focus of efforts throughout and beyond the status process.

Argentina believes that there cannot be a prosperous and peaceful future for Kosovo without full respect for the diversity of the people who live there. A sustainable resolution of the question of Kosovo must be achieved with full application of the principle of territorial integrity. In this context, we attach the greatest importance to respect for human rights, including the rights of refugees and displaced persons, as well as for international humanitarian law and minority rights.

Once again, we would like to stress that the political process must be moved forward by making effective progress in implementing the eight standards, which is essential for the sustainability of the process to determine Kosovo's future status.

We welcome the efforts that have begun and urge the parties to do their best to bring to a successful

conclusion the work that is under way and the efforts to be undertaken shortly in Vienna.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like first of all to welcome Mr. Tadic, President of Serbia, to the Council, and to thank him for his statement. I would also like to welcome the presence of Mr. Jessen-Petersen and to thank him for his very comprehensive briefing on the activities of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

I welcome the role played by the Mission in transferring more competencies to the Provisional Institutions in the rule of law sector.

Last month, Mr. Ibrahim Rugova, a very important person in relation to the events that have occurred in the territory, passed away. We would like to convey our condolences to the people of Kosovo for that loss. We hope that his death will not have a negative impact on the stability of Kosovo or on its future status.

I would like to congratulate Mr. Fatmir Sejdiu, who has been elected President of Kosovo. We have every hope that he will continue his predecessor's endeavours to strengthen the stability of the territory and to serve the best interests of the people of Kosovo.

We welcome the efforts made by Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. We hope that his approach will lead to dialogue through which a lasting solution can be found for the province of Kosovo.

The future status of Kosovo will depend on the efforts of the Kosovo Serbs, which we hope will help to improve the situation. We call upon all parties to participate in the dialogue in an atmosphere of complete independence. We should continue to support that process.

I would like to commend the Contact Group for its efforts, which have led to the establishment of favourable conditions. There has been an improvement in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, but it needs to be continued with the assistance of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. At the same time, it will be important in future to strengthen the rule of law and to ensure the proper administration of public affairs. The rights of minorities must be respected.

The security situation in Kosovo continues to be perilous. Statistics have shown that, because of security problems, refugee returns are not taking place as they should. We were struck in particular by the project developed by the Ministry of Education with regard to mixed classes, bringing together Albanians and Serbs. We believe that that approach might make it possible to resolve the problem in a comprehensive manner. That might make it possible to define the future status of Kosovo.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): I too should like at the outset to thank Mr. Jessen-Petersen, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing and for his resolute leadership of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. I would also like to welcome the presence of Mr. Tadic, President of Serbia, and of Mr. Kosumi, Prime Minister of Kosovo, who is here as part of Mr. Jessen-Petersen's delegation.

I fully associate myself with the statement to be made later by the Permanent Representative of Austria on behalf of the presidency of the European Union. I should like, however, to make a few brief comments.

I should like, first of all, to pay tribute to the memory of President Rugova, who devoted his life to defending his people by peaceful means. It is now for his successor, Mr. Fatmir Sejdiu, and the authorities and the people of Kosovo as a whole, to follow in his footsteps by constructively engaging in the talks that will soon begin.

We share the Secretary-General's analysis of the progress achieved in Kosovo over the past few months. There can be no doubt that the authorities are now better prepared to participate in the negotiations. However, we must acknowledge that too little has been done in terms of genuinely implementing the standards. We now expect concrete action and improvements on the ground. Whatever Kosovo's future status may be, it will have to be multi-ethnic. It is today that future relationships among the various communities must begin to be built. We therefore call upon the Prime Minister and all of Kosovo's Provisional Institutions to take the necessary measures to accelerate the implementation of the priority standards.

The capacity of Kosovo's authorities to find solutions to a range of problems, including those relating to security, education, housing, refugee return and the power supply, will be seen as a basic criterion when the time comes to determine Kosovo's status.

Since the previous Security Council meeting on Kosovo (see S/PV.5289), the Secretary-General has appointed Mr. Martti Ahtisaari to lead the talks on Kosovo's status. We believe it essential, at this sensitive time, for the international community as whole, and the Security Council in particular, to unfailingly support his mission. We believe in particular that the approach that he has chosen — to tackle concrete questions first — is entirely appropriate.

At the same time, we must not lose sight of the objective set out by the Contact Group in London on 31 January: to conclude the negotiations in 2006. We call upon the political authorities in Belgrade and in Pristina to resolutely engage in a constructive dialogue with Mr. Ahtissari. In this connection, the meeting scheduled for 20 and 21 February in Vienna on matters relating to decentralization is essential for the dialogue to start on a positive note. Be that as it may, the final status will have to be, among other things, acceptable to the population of Kosovo. The leaders of Serbia and Kosovo will have to demonstrate courage and political vision in order to find a realistic solution.

Just as the Contact Group did in its statement of 31 January, we would like to recall the specific nature of the Kosovo question. The current situation is the result of dramatic events that followed upon the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. The solution to be found for Kosovo's status must necessarily take this into account.

Whatever Kosovo's future status may be, it will be anchored in Europe's architecture. It is also from this perspective that progress towards a democratic and multi-ethnic society is indispensable, in our view. We hope that the parties will make the best use of the coming months to this end.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): Like others, I should like to thank the Secretary-General for his report and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Mr. Søren Jessen-Petersen, for his briefing. I would also like to thank the President of the Republic of Serbia, Mr. Boris Tadic, for his presence here today and for his statement. Denmark also welcomes the presence at this meeting of the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Mr. Bajram Kosumi, as part of the UNMIK delegation.

I would like to associate myself with the statement to be delivered later by the Permanent Representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

My Government is profoundly sad at the passing away of the President of Kosovo, Mr. Ibrahim Rugova. President Rugova was a man of dignity, a man of dialogue and a man of reconciliation. He stood by these values even in times of war and upheaval. We welcome the election of Mr. Fatmir Sejdiu as his successor and hope that President Sejdiu will promote the same values as the late President Rugova.

Substantial dialogue between Kosovo's communities, as well as between Pristina and Belgrade, is of utmost importance. Therefore, we welcome the first meeting at the ministerial level on decentralization that took place in Vienna in September 2005. We urge all parties to engage constructively in the upcoming meetings on decentralization that are scheduled to start in Vienna on 20 February. We join the Secretary-General's call on Belgrade to encourage Kosovo Serbs to participate constructively in the Provisional Institutions in Pristina. The Kosovo Serbs are the glue that binds the parties together, and their presence would contribute positively to the process.

Denmark shares the Secretary-General's assessment that, in spite of progress in some areas, overall progress on standards implementation has been too slow on the part of the authorities in Pristina. We therefore join the Secretary-General in urging Kosovo's political leaders to renew their efforts to ensure substantive, accelerated and sustainable progress in the implementation of standards. This includes key areas, such as the return of refugees and internally displaced people, access to justice, the preservation of cultural heritage and improved conditions for minorities.

The appointment of Mr. Martti Ahtisaari as the Secretary-General's Special Envoy to lead the process designed to determine Kosovo's future status received the full support of the members of this Council. The appointment signalled the start of a new policy — the policy of standards and status. The logic of launching the status process while standards implementation is still ongoing was based on a recommendation in the comprehensive review last September under the leadership of Ambassador Eide.

Today, I think it is particularly important that we pay attention to one of the key principles behind Ambassador Eide's logic — namely, that success in negotiating and implementing a future status will depend on future standards implementation. Ambassador Eide further warned that insufficient standards implementation would entail the risk of turning a future status into a failed status. The final status depends on both the implementation of standards and the constructive engagement of Belgrade and of Kosovo's minority communities. It is in the interest of all of Kosovo's communities and, indeed, of the whole region to ensure that Kosovo turns out to be success.

My country views Kosovo as a key regional issue. Denmark steadfastly supports UNMIK, the UNMIK police and the Kosovo Force. We look forward to a more peaceful and prosperous future, which the peoples of South-Eastern Europe deserve. This will entail close regional cooperation between former foes and for the common integration of these truly European countries into the Euro-Atlantic institutions where they rightfully belong. However, the Euro-Atlantic perspectives depend on the implementation of standards and a sustainable solution to Kosovo's future status.

Mr. Kitaoka (Japan): Mr. President, I thank you for convening today's public meeting. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Jessen-Petersen, for his comprehensive briefing. I welcome the presence in this Chamber of Mr. Boris Tadic, President of Serbia, and thank him for his statement. I also welcome the presence of Mr. Bajram Kosumi, Prime Minister of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government. The Government of Japan is gratified that Mr. Fatmir Sejdiu was smoothly elected as President of Kosovo on 10 February and expects Kosovo's constructive engagement in the future status talks under his leadership.

The focus of today's discussion is the issue of delays in the implementation of standards. The Security Council has discussed this issue on numerous occasions. The international community has many times reiterated its message that the implementation of standards will be of direct benefit to Kosovo itself for the objective of building a democratic, multi-ethnic society, as well as for the improvement in the daily lives of the people of Kosovo.

Furthermore, it is clear that progress in the implementation of the standards has become even more crucial since the political process for the future status of Kosovo was launched last autumn. Seeing the delays and setbacks that have occurred in the implementation of the majority of the standards to date, we cannot help but regret the lack of progress. I also recognize the critical importance of the question of how the international community can provide guidance to the political leaders of a society in a post-conflict period.

Based on these perspectives, I would like to make the following three points.

First, I would like to address a comment to the parties directly responsible for standards implementation, including Prime Minister Kosumi and the other political leaders of Kosovo. The implementation of standards should remain a priority for the purpose of building a democratic, multi-ethnic society, regardless of the direction of the future status talks. Japan considers progress in standards implementation to be one of the important prerequisites for successful status talks. Japan requests the political leaders of Kosovo to show, through their actions, their willingness and capability to build a democratic and multi-ethnic society. The political leaders in Belgrade also have the ability to influence the standards implementation process. It is our hope that, as envisioned in the Secretary-General's report, the authorities in Belgrade will support and encourage the participation of Kosovo Serbs in the political process in Kosovo.

My second point concerns what the international community should do. It is essential that we devise a strategy to bring about a breakthrough on the issue of the delay of standards implementation. It would be most effective to concentrate our efforts in high-priority areas. My Government therefore welcomes the Contact Group's ministerial statement issued on 31 January, which underscores the importance of the decentralization process. Progress in decentralization could serve as a model case as well as create an improved environment for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, an environment in which Kosovo Albanians and other minorities — including Kosovo Serbs — would make decisions for their mutual benefit through direct dialogue. We reiterate our expectation of a proactive effort by the relevant parties, including the authorities in Belgrade.

The third point I wish to make is that, in addition to the measures I have just outlined and in parallel with those measures, it would be meaningful if we could make substantive progress with regard to cohabitation and tolerance among the various ethnic groups in Kosovo at the community level, focusing on the economic aspect and on the life of the people. The Government of Japan will be holding a seminar on "Community-building in the multi-ethnic societies of the Western Balkans from the human security point of view" in late March in Tokyo to follow up on the Ministerial Conference on Peace Consolidation and Economic Development of the Western Balkans. We have already sent invitations to the countries of the Western Balkans and to other relevant partners. We hope that the seminar will produce fruitful and concrete results and thus contribute to the resolution of the problems in Kosovo, including through reforms in the area of local autonomy.

Mr. Manongi (United Republic of Tanzania): We join in welcoming President Tadic of Serbia. We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Jessen-Petersen, for his insightful briefing, and we recognize the presence of Prime Minister Kosumi of Kosovo in his delegation.

We welcome the election of Mr. Fatmir Sejdiu, the new President of Kosovo, and we trust that he will continue the efforts of the late President Ibrahim Rugova to seek a peaceful resolution of the problems facing Kosovo.

We regard the future status of Kosovo as one of the most serious issues remaining in building the stability and peace we seek for Kosovo in the Balkans. We are therefore pleased to note the significant preparations for the talks on the future status of Kosovo with the facilitation of the former President of Finland, Mr. Ahtisaari, whom we hold in the highest regard.

We believe that those efforts need to be complemented by enhanced momentum in the implementation of the standards. We join the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in strongly urging the leaders of Kosovo to renew their efforts to promote substantive, accelerated and sustainable progress in the standards implementation process. We agree with him that such progress will demonstrate the willingness of Kosovo's leaders to create a foundation for a multi-ethnic and democratic society.

We also agree that there must be increased efforts aimed at local government reform, decentralization, governance and human rights standards. We therefore regret to note from the Special Representative's briefing that there is slower progress in the area of minority rights. Nonetheless, we welcome President Sejdiu's letter to the Council, in which he reaffirms his commitment to the implementation of the standards, which he sees as values that will provide Kosovo with a path towards broader regional integration. We welcome that reaffirmation, believing, as we do, that the issue of Kosovo's status will ultimately be resolved in the context of wider integration. We see clarity regarding the status of Kosovo as an important element in unleashing the potential of its people and of its economy.

We deplore the violent incidents that have continued to take place, including the shooting of the seniormost Kosovo Serb officer of the Kosovo Police Service. Such incidents risk being perceived as ethnically motivated, even though some of them may not be linked to ethnic conflicts.

The low numbers of returnees are also of some concern. A conducive environment must be created to ensure that refugees and internally displaced persons wishing to return to Kosovo can do so in a state of security.

Finally, we commend the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, the European Union and all other countries and organizations that have made financial, moral and political commitments to make positive changes in Kosovo and in the Balkans in general so that the people of various ethnicities in that region may enjoy peaceful and secure coexistence.

Nana Effah-Apenteng (Ghana): First, my delegation welcomes the participation of President Boris Tadic of Serbia in the Council's deliberations. We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2006/45) and Mr. Søren Jessen-Petersen, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Kosovo, for his briefing and his excellent stewardship of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

Ghana welcomes the achievements of UNMIK over the past five years, most of which were highlighted in the Secretary-General's report to the Security Council of 23 May 2005 (S/2005/335). Since then, considerable progress has been made, despite

occasional setbacks. However, these are to be expected, given the volatile situation in Kosovo in the light of the apparently unresolved question of its future status.

In particular, we are encouraged that the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government have taken root at the national, municipal and local levels. We hope that the minority groups, especially the Kosovo Serbs, will continue to be encouraged to involve themselves more actively in the political and reconciliation process. In that regard, UNMIK's tireless efforts to engage the factions with one another and with the authorities in Belgrade are equally commendable.

Given the religious undertones of the conflict, we appreciate the efforts that are being made to repair and protect the Serb religious and cultural heritage. In view of the mistrust between the groups, much more attention should be focused on decentralization, the rule of law and improving the internal security architecture as confidence-building measures.

The recent smooth transition of power to a new administration headed by President Fatmir Sejdiu following the death of his predecessor, Mr. Ibrahim Rugova, and by the new Prime Minister, Mr. Bajram Kosumi, whose presence here we welcome, is also indicative of a new consensus for peace in Kosovo. Everything must be done to sustain the momentum.

We are concerned that progress by Kosovo's Provisional Institutions and by the Kosovo Albanian leadership on standards implementation and on other major political processes has been too slow, as stated in the Secretary-General's report. In that regard, Ghana believes that the standards agreed for the achievement of a sustainable, multi-ethnic society can guarantee lasting peace, security and stability in Kosovo. We therefore take this opportunity to reiterate our support for the standards-before-status policy, which, in our view, establishes the preconditions for determining the extremely sensitive nature of the future of Kosovo.

We should be careful not to unduly prolong the current impasse, so as to discourage the factions from hardening their stance on the issue. In the meantime, efforts should be intensified to identify, and deal with, those who are behind the recent unprovoked attacks on innocent people. Impunity should not be tolerated in the new multi-ethnic Kosovo that we all envision.

In conclusion, we wish to reiterate that only a negotiated settlement in which the rights and interests of all of Kosovo's minorities are guaranteed will provide the best tonic for peaceful co-existence in Kosovo, and for peace and stability in the Balkans as a whole.

Mr. Burian (Slovakia): We too would like to welcome President Tadic of the Republic of Serbia and to thank him for his statement. We would also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere condolences to Mr. Kosumi, Prime Minister of Kosovo, and to the people of Kosovo, on the passing away of President Rugova.

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Søren Jessen-Petersen, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his comprehensive briefing. We commend the very profound and balanced analysis and evaluation of the situation in Kosovo contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). We believe that, as a result of the Security Council's decision to launch negotiations to define the future status of Kosovo, the role of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) is even more vital and instrumental for the peace, stability and prosperity of the region, as well as for the lasting settlement of the issue of Kosovo.

Slovakia fully associates itself with the statement to be made by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union. I shall therefore limit my statement to several points that we consider to be critical for Kosovo's future.

First of all, we understand and support the need to find a lasting and balanced settlement regarding Kosovo's future status. At the same time, it is our understanding — and as is highlighted in the Contact Group's guiding principles for the settlement of Kosovo's status — that the settlement of the issue of Kosovo must be fully compatible with international standards of human rights, democracy and international law, and must contribute to regional security.

That is why we believe it is important to seek a negotiated settlement and compromise from both Belgrade and Pristina on the issues of future status and peaceful co-existence through direct talks and dialogue. Only a solution that reflects the objective and legitimate concerns of all parties involved, and which is not considered as being imposed from outside, will,

in our view, contribute to lasting security and stability in the region. In that context, we believe that all options for the outcome of the status talks should remain open for discussion. In our view, it is also important that all participants in the talks refrain from any kind of activities or statements that can give Belgrade or Pristina the undesirable impression that the outcome of final status talks has already been prejudged or precooked.

In our view, the participation of the Kosovo Serbs in the future status process and their engagement in Kosovo's political life is of critical importance. We therefore call upon Kosovo Serbs to participate in the process and in the political life of Kosovo in order to influence the processes that will be decisive for their future. We also call on Belgrade and Pristina to allow Kosovo Serbs to exercise their rights in a way that will contribute to a positive atmosphere for the negotiating process and to the stabilization of the region.

Secondly, we believe that standards of democracy and tolerance are the key to peaceful multi-ethnic co-existence. We fully support the Secretary-General's appeal to all parties to take visible and tangible steps towards progress in the implementation of the standards, which, in our opinion, has been insufficient and slow. Lack of progress in that area affects the day-to-day lives of all people, especially those belonging to national or ethnic minorities. The Government of Kosovo must try harder to ensure that everyone in Kosovo is able to get equal treatment and the same level of respect regardless of ethnic origin or religious beliefs. In that connection, we also note the assurances given by Mr. Sejdiu, newly elected President of Kosovo, that Kosovo's institutions remain fully committed to the further implementation of standards.

Success in the implementation of the post-conflict project for a multi-ethnic Kosovo will in practice be measured by the situation on the ground for Kosovo Serbs and other ethnic groups. In our opinion, the low number of refugees and internally displaced persons returning to Kosovo is an alarming indicator that the current efforts of the Kosovar Government to create adequate conditions for returns are insufficient. There are many outstanding issues — including the guarantee of property rights — that, in our view, the Kosovar authorities must address more vigorously.

The decentralization and protection of Serbian Orthodox sites and institutions remain crucial issues with regard to confidence-building measures. In that context, we hope that the upcoming Vienna meeting on decentralization will bring about positive results.

On the other hand, we cautiously share the positive assessment regarding the increase in minority employment in the central Government and in the Kosovo Protection Corps.

The establishment of trustworthy local judiciary and security institutions based on the principle of multi-ethnicity is an integral part, and the key to the future success, of security sector and judicial reform, as well as overall transformation in Kosovo.

Thirdly, we believe that the economic development of a country, especially during a period of transition, goes hand in hand with the process of democratization and the rule of law.

We strongly encourage all stakeholders in the region to use the new impetus provided by the future status negotiations to be held under the auspices of the international community, represented by Mr. Ahtisaari, to make take significant steps with regard to confidence-building measures between all communities and entities in Kosovo.

Last but not least, in our opinion it is of the greatest importance that the future status of Kosovo be visibly disconnected from any other global political developments. The future model for a solution in Kosovo must not be automatically applied as a precedent in addressing other conflict situations.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

I would like to welcome Special Representative Jessen-Petersen back to the Security Council, and to thank him for his excellent briefing. I would also like to thank President Tadic of Serbia and Montenegro for joining us today.

At the outset, we would like to remember the very sad death of President Rugova last month. We congratulate the people of Kosovo, however, on the election of President Sejdiu. He will have a difficult and important job as Kosovo enters future status talks. Resolving Kosovo's status will finally put the conflicts of the 1990s behind us.

When we look at Kosovo, we know that we must reach a settlement that enhances regional stability, promotes democratic governance and accelerates the

Euro-Atlantic integration of the region. Special Envoy Ahtisaari has begun the process to achieve that, and he hopes to conclude his work in the course of 2006.

Kosovo's status will come in the context of arrangements to protect minority rights, enhance regional security and reduce the chances of future conflicts. Those arrangements bear upon long-term stability.

We know that the implementation of standards is very important. We believe that there has been real progress on the implementation of standards, but, in order for the pace of future status negotiations to accelerate, the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government need to do even more. Parties must be ready to engage on key issues, including minority rights, decentralization and the status of religious sites — issues that will allow Kosovo to remain multi-ethnic regardless of its status.

We must be realistic about possible outcomes. Independence is a possible outcome. Any status outcome must be acceptable to the people of Kosovo. We have to keep in mind that the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia, the ethnic cleansing and humanitarian crises of 1999 and the extended period of international administration under Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) make Kosovo a very special case.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Austria, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Pfanzelter (Austria): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania; the candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area; and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

Let me begin by thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Mr. Soren Jessen-Petersen, for his excellent briefing, and by reiterating the European Union's full and strong support for his work. We would also like to warmly welcome the participation of the President of Serbia, Mr. Boris Tadic. At the same time, we also warmly welcome the presence of the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Mr. Bajram Kosumi, in the delegation headed by Mr. Jessen-Petersen.

The European Union expresses its profound sadness at the passing away of the President of Kosovo, Mr. Ibrahim Rugova. Kosovo has lost a historic leader who devoted his life to promoting peacefully the rights of his people. In this time of important decisions for the future of Kosovo, the European Union calls on all Kosovar parties and leaders to work together so that further progress can be achieved in implementing standards and so that Kosovo can participate constructively in the status process. In that context, the EU welcomes the election of Mr. Fatmir Sejdiu as President of Kosovo. His election on 10 February, coming so swiftly after the end of the mourning period for the late President, signals stability and continuity and marks an important step towards the further consolidation of Kosovo's political life.

Much has changed since the Secretary-General and the Special Representative last reported to the Council on the situation in Kosovo. Last year, the conduct of the comprehensive review, under the leadership of Ambassador Kai Eide, encouraged the Kosovo Provisional Institutions of Self-Government to make progress on the implementation of the standards, dialogue between communities and reform of local Government. In November, the Secretary-General appointed Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, former President of Finland, as his Special Envoy to lead the political process designed to determine the future status of Kosovo. Mr. Ahtisaari and his deputy, Austria's countryman Ambassador Albert Rohan, have started to work on the future status and held initial consultations in the region. Mr. Ahtisaari's negotiation team enjoys the full support of the European Union.

The European Union shares the Secretary-General's assessment that, since his report last May, the Kosovo Albanian leaders have made significant progress in preparations for the status process, as well as some progress in other areas, such as the protection of property rights and the reconstruction of cultural and religious heritage. We also share his assessment that overall progress on standards implementation has been too slow and his serious concern that there have been delays or setbacks in most areas of standards implementation.

Together with the Secretary-General, the European Union strongly urges Kosovo's institutions to renew their efforts to ensure substantive, accelerated and sustainable progress in the implementation of the standards, especially in such key areas as returns, equal access to justice and the preservation of cultural heritage. Their commitment is crucial to the prospects for a sustainable status settlement that will enable all communities to live and thrive in safety.

The European Union attaches particular importance to the establishment of a substantial dialogue between all Kosovo communities, as well as between Belgrade and Pristina. We hope that today's presence of President Tadic and Prime Minister Kosumi will give new impetus in that regard. We call upon the authorities in Belgrade to encourage, rather than discourage, the Kosovo Serb leaders to participate constructively in the Provisional Institutions, which would contribute to concrete improvements in their living conditions and ensure that their interests are taken into account. All communities should participate actively in the political process for standards implementation and become more involved in presenting their own communities' interests during the status process. At the same time, leaders on all sides will have to prepare their populations for difficult compromises ahead.

The European Union also expects Kosovo's institutions to move ahead on the reform of local self-government and welcomes the first ministerial-level meeting on decentralization, held in Vienna last September. It also urges both parties to participate and engage constructively in the meeting on decentralization organized by the United Nations Status Envoy in Vienna, which has now been scheduled for 20 February.

The European Union calls upon both Pristina and Belgrade to engage constructively in the working group on missing persons and hopes that progress can be made on that humanitarian issue. We further remind the relevant authorities of their commitment to alleviating, without further delay, the humanitarian crisis created by the continued use of contaminated facilities for the temporary residence of a large Roma community in Mitrovica. Bureaucratic obstacles must be overcome. In that regard, the European Union supports the call made by UNMIK, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund on 9 February 2006 for all Roma, Ashkaeli and Egyptian communities to vacate the lead-polluted camps in northern Mitrovica in Kosovo and to move their families to the safer environment at Osterode camp. We also remind the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of the need to find a long-term solution for the internally displaced persons. They should continue to work towards creating safe housing for such persons, and should move quickly to provide sustainable options for returns and permanent housing.

The European Union also fully supports the call of the foreign ministers of the Contact Group, at their meeting on 31 January, for all possible efforts to be made to achieve a negotiated settlement in the course of 2006. In that respect, we encourage leaders in both Serbia and Kosovo to show the political courage and vision necessary to come forward with realistic proposals.

Whatever Kosovo's future status will be, it will be firmly rooted in the European architecture. With that tangible European perspective in mind, accelerated implementation of standards should not be viewed just as a goal in itself or as a quicker way to a decision on the future status of Kosovo. Effective standards implementation, including dialogue and outreach to Kosovo's minority communities — thereby building a sustainable democratic and multi-ethnic society — is also a prerequisite for the fulfilment of Kosovo's European perspective. In December, the European Union adopted a new European Partnership document for Kosovo within the European Union's broader Stabilization and Association Process for the Western Balkans. The Partnership incorporates the standards as requirements for Kosovo's long-term European perspective, thereby underscoring that they must continue to be a central focus of efforts by the Provisional Institutions throughout and beyond the status process.

The European Union has been steadfastly at the side of the people of Kosovo throughout the post-conflict period and has provided a major part of international aid, economic access, political support and reform advice. The Contact Group guiding principles for a settlement of the status of Kosovo, adopted in November 2005, make it clear that Kosovo will require an international civilian and military presence to supervise compliance with the provisions of the status settlement to ensure the security and protection of minorities and to support the continued implementation of the standards. The European Union

is fully engaged in the status process and is in close contact with Mr. Ahtisaari. It has appointed Mr. Stefan Lehne as EU representative to the Kosovo future status process. We are ready to assume our responsibilities and to work on an enhanced future EU engagement, with a view to assisting a democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo in its efforts to realize its European perspective. In parallel, we are already cooperating closely with other international agencies that will continue to play a role in Kosovo according to their comparative strengths and specializations.

In concluding this long statement on behalf of the European Union, to which nearly 40 States adhered, I wish to recall that, on 27 January, the European Commission adopted a communication entitled "The Western Balkans on the road to the EU: consolidating stability and raising prosperity". The EU Council of Ministers welcomed the communication as a good basis for further work in preparing discussions at the informal EU-Western Balkans Foreign Ministers meeting to be held in Salzburg in March 2006. Thus, the European Union remains committed to helping the Western Balkan countries by practical measures to make the European perspective more tangible.

The President: I thank Ambassador Pfanzelter for the European Union's sixth statement this morning on its common foreign and security policy.

I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Kuchinsky (Ukraine): Mr. President, at the outset, I would like to welcome His Excellency Mr. Boris Tadic, President of the Republic of Serbia, and to thank him for his statement. I would also like to welcome the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, Mr. Søren Jessen-Petersen, and his delegation, and to thank him for his very thorough and informative briefing on the current situation in Kosovo.

Fully adhering to the principled approach to the Kosovo issue eloquently expressed in the European Union statement, I would like to touch upon some specific issues that, in our view, might be of importance for ensuring lasting peace in the region of the Western Balkans and in Europe as a whole.

As an active contributor to international stability, Ukraine is closely observing the situation in South-Eastern Europe, and in Kosovo in particular. Agreeing that there is a need to give new impetus to the ongoing political process, and supporting the efforts of the Contact Group to achieve a viable and lasting settlement of the situation in Kosovo, we think we should be guided by the need to attain final stabilization of the political, economic and security situation on the basis of relevant decisions of the Security Council, including resolution 1244 (1999), in full compliance, of course, with the principles of international law.

Ukraine endorses the negotiating process between Belgrade and Pristina, the establishment of an effective dialogue between all Kosovo communities and the search for a mutually acceptable compromise settlement. We attach particular importance to standards implementation and to guaranteeing human rights and the rights of all Kosovo ethnic groups.

In our view, the political process of determining the future status of Kosovo, which was initiated by the United Nations and which we fully support, should be handled with utmost care and delicacy, taking into account its possible implications for the whole European security architecture. Protracted or frozen conflicts still remain on the continent, representing a threat to common security and stability.

Therefore, any imposed decision or hasty action can destabilize the situation in the Western Balkans region and can create dangerous precedents. We support a decision on Kosovo's status that would strengthen security and stability in the region and in Europe as a whole. In that specific context, it would be quite natural to assume that the political process of settling Kosovo's status represents a specific case and that it should not be claimed as a precedent for any other issue.

From the very outset of the Kosovo crisis, Ukraine has made efforts aimed at settling it through political means and has been assisting with post-conflict stabilization in the region. Ukraine actively participates in the peacekeeping efforts of the international community in Kosovo.

Fully understanding the need for a continued international civilian and military presence in Kosovo during the whole process of standards implementation and the need to ensure security throughout the region, Ukraine remains committed to making a tangible

contribution to the efforts of the international community in this important area.

The President: I call now on the representative of Turkey.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): Allow me to start by expressing our heartfelt condolences to the people of Kosovo on the passing of President Rugova. His peaceful and constructive policies will always be remembered with great appreciation.

I welcome the high-level delegation headed by the President of Serbia, His Excellency Mr. Boris Tadic, as well as the Prime Minister of Kosovo, His Excellency Mr. Bajram Kosumi. May I also extend our deep appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report describing the present situation in Kosovo (S/2006/45). I would also like to thank Mr. Søren Jessen-Petersen, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Kosovo, for his briefing today and to commend him and his colleagues for their tireless efforts.

Turkey aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union. Therefore, I shall confine myself to making some brief comments on a number of points that we think are of particular importance, as seen from Turkey.

At the outset, I would like to underline that Turkey, also a Balkan country, has always been directly involved in efforts to establish peace and stability in the region. Within this framework, Turkey contributes to the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe missions, as well as to the NATO-led Kosovo Force.

The decentralization process, fair and equitable representation of all minorities in the political and administrative structures of Kosovo, respect for the cultural rights of minorities, the pursuit of economic reforms, dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina as well as between all Kosovo communities, and the return of refugees and internally displaced people to their homes are the main priorities of my country for Kosovo. In this respect, we hope and expect that the future political structure in Kosovo will reflect the multi-ethnic nature of the region and will be able to reach out to all communities. We believe that improved security conditions and region-wide implementation of property legislation would encourage the returns process, which remains very slow.

We welcome the holding of direct talks between Pristina and Belgrade in Vienna on 20 February on the decentralization issue. We believe that such direct contacts can and should serve as a platform for the parties to put forward their respective positions on concrete issues. Yet we also believe that any announcement relating to a specific deadline could be counterproductive at this stage. What really matters is achieving a sustainable solution.

We also welcome the launch, with the support of UNMIK, of the decentralization pilot projects, one of them being the Kosovo Turkish-majority area. Likewise, we welcome the establishment of the Consultative Committee for Minorities, which will provide advice on minority issues. Furthermore, we deem it crucial that all minorities be engaged in the status talks. To that end, we believe that a representative for all minorities, in addition to the one for the Kosovo Serbs, should be present in the negotiating team. Another option would be to institutionalize the relationship between the Consultative Committee for Minorities and the negotiating team so that all minorities could share their views and proposals with the negotiating parties at each stage of the talks relating to the future status. Furthermore, we believe that minorities should be included in the drafting of the new constitution.

I would like to conclude by reiterating the strong commitment of the Turkish Government to the security, stability and prosperity of the Balkans, as well as of Kosovo.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Albania.

Mr. Dilja (Albania): At the outset, it is a distinct pleasure for me, Mr. President, to warmly congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and to thank you for having convened this meeting.

On behalf of the Albanian delegation, I welcome President Tadic here today. I would also like to warmly welcome Prime Minister Kosumi. His presence is a significant message of recognition of his Government's commitment and responsibility with regard to building a democratic, multi-ethnic, stable and prosperous Kosovo for all of its citizens.

I extend my delegation's sincere thanks to Mr. Jessen-Petersen, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his excellent briefing. We are delighted to welcome him here today, and we compliment him on his excellent work and outstanding leadership of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). I assure him of my Government's full support for all of his endeavours.

The passing of President Rugova was a great loss for Kosovo. Kosovo lost a man of peace and wisdom who was committed to achieving a free, tolerant and democratic future of his country by peaceful means. We pay tribute to him today and express our appreciation that Kosovar society swiftly and maturely overcame that difficult moment. We hail the new President, Mr. Sejdiu, and congratulate him on his election. We express our conviction that President Sejdiu and the entire political spectrum will follow Rugova's path, vision and goal.

We have before us the Secretary-General's report on the activities of UNMIK and on the situation in Kosovo during the last months of the previous year. Albania shares its assessment of the progress made, as well as its message with regard to accelerating the implementation of the standards.

As the report states, the comprehensive review has encouraged the Kosovo Provisional Institutions to make progress both on the implementation of the standards and on a number of other important processes. We note with satisfaction the stable political and security situation in Kosovo, something that has been clear since the death of President Rugova; the improvement in freedom of movement and the protection of property rights; the rapid progress on privatization; the progress in the dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade; the good work on repairing and protecting the Serbian Orthodox cultural and religious heritage; and, last but not least, the significant progress in preparations for final status. Those and other achievements identified in the report and in the briefing of Special Representative of the Secretary-General are all indicators of the commitment of Kosovo's Institutions with regard to standards implementation and positive and promising signs of a process which has already started.

The period covered by the report was a significant and challenging one for Kosovo. A number of important serious events took place during that time, all of which undoubtedly attracted a great deal of attention, sometimes, perhaps, even by diverting attention from other responsibilities. Thus, conclusions on the pace of progress on standards implementation should be seen in the context of the challenge represented by those specific times and events.

Nevertheless, we join in the Secretary-General's appeal to the Kosovo leaders to reinvigorate their efforts to ensure accelerated and sustainable progress in the implementation of the standards. We share the view that a long-term European perspective for Kosovo requires effective standards implementation. At the same time, we reaffirm our understanding that this is an ongoing process. It should and will continue to remain a central focus for the Government and the people of Kosovo, to be vigorously pursued throughout and beyond the status proceedings. In fact, we strongly believe that the definition of Kosovo's status will focus a significant amount of energy on the implementation of all the standards and will swiftly accelerate progress in all areas.

We are all aware that various issues need to be addressed with the necessary attention, will and energy in Kosovo today. Decentralization is an important issue that will benefit everyone; it will advance the rights of minorities, strengthen local initiatives and assist the economic and social development of all areas and communities. But decentralization is also a delicate issue that should be addressed carefully within the framework of a well-defined status for Kosovo. As long as Kosovo's central institutions do not enjoy genuine and complete self-governing status, the decentralization process will remain vague and difficult to fully implement. We welcome and look forward with hope to the upcoming negotiations in Vienna on that matter and encourage both sides to work constructively.

Albania supports the dialogue between Kosovo's communities and also between Pristina and Belgrade. The parties must be engaged in good faith. Issues of human concern, such as missing persons and returns, and other technical issues are important; they need to be discussed if further progress is to be made. Let us note that, besides the encouraging work of Kosovo's Institutions to create an atmosphere of security and confidence for returns, for example, the process also requires political will and real efforts on the part of Kosovo Serbs and Belgrade. We encourage the Kosovo

Serbs to directly participate and engage in Kosovo's Institutions.

Kosovo is experiencing very important times; its status process has become a major political issue that is being followed closely in the region and beyond. Kosovo's political leaders have made significant efforts to prepare for the process by establishing a unified negotiating team — which, we are sure, will be wisely and professionally led by President Sejdiu — by adopting the political platform and by preparing for this crucial process.

My Government has welcomed the Contact Group's guiding principles for the settlement of Kosovo's status. We fully agree and reiterate that Kosovo should not return to the pre-March 1999 situation — that there should be no changes in Kosovo's current territory, no partition of Kosovo and no union with any other country or with part of any other country.

We reaffirm our full support for Mr. Ahtisaari and his negotiating team. We think that an accelerated status process would be the best approach. Albania commends the most recent statement of the Contact Group and its appeal for a realistic, stable and multi-ethnic solution to Kosovo's status.

We hold the view that the most realistic, pragmatic, just and fair option with regard to status is independence, with support from the international community. That solution would respect the will of the people of Kosovo. But it would not only do that. We believe, and are confident, that independence will ensure the promotion and protection of minority rights and of Kosovo's cultural and religious heritage; that it will generate political and social stability and security for Kosovo and security for the whole region; and that it will help to establish a sustainable, multi-ethnic and democratic society there. It will conform with democratic values and European standards and will help pave the way for a European perspective. Indeed, those are the conditions on which the Kosovars should agree and that they should articulate strongly in the status negotiations.

Lastly, let me reassure the Security Council that the Albanian Government will remain fully committed to playing an active, moderate and constructive role in the region. It is committed to playing such a role in this particular case, in Kosovo, throughout this process. As I mentioned earlier, the international community, the Security Council and Mr. Ahtisaari's team will always have a reliable partner in Tirana.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Jessen-Petersen to respond to comments and questions raised.

Mr. Jessen-Petersen: First of all, let me thank the Council for its expression of support for our Mission and for the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government and the people of Kosovo, and also for the many helpful observations that Council members have made today.

On behalf of the Institutions in Kosovo and the people of Kosovo, I also want to thank Council members for the many expressions of condolence on the passing of President Rugova and the many generous and, may I say, deserved words on his life and his legacy. And I wish to thank members for the congratulations extended to the newly elected President of Kosovo, Mr. Fatmir Sejdiu.

I also listened with interest to the statement by President Tadic. In the past, President Tadic has recommended the participation of Kosovo Serbs in the processes and the Institutions in Kosovo, so that they can be part of shaping the future of Kosovo — their own future. I am sure that President Tadic today has heard the many statements in the Council urging Belgrade to engage constructively with Kosovo and also to allow the Kosovo Serbs to engage and be part of shaping the future. I count on President Tadic to follow the advice expressed by the Council today. We need the involvement of Belgrade. We need the direct engagement of the Kosovo Serbs to see further progress on all the issues affecting the minorities. Without them, it will be very difficult to achieve the necessary progress, in particular in the areas of returns and freedom of movement.

I am also glad that Prime Minister Bajram Kosumi has been here today. He has heard the many calls about the importance that this Council attaches to further and faster progress and standards, notably on minority issues, as well as the importance that the Council attaches to decentralization. I certainly count on Prime Minister Kosumi to go back, to lead the Government in working even harder to see further and more significant progress on standards, and I count on the delegation of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government to go to Vienna with a constructive and

forthcoming approach to decentralization. I know that that is exactly what they will do.

We have now entered the critical and most decisive phase of the mission of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, and I count on the continued support and the engagement of the international community in general and the Security Council in particular, and, once again, I want to thank the Security Council for its support.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 1.55 p.m.